



Representative

Jeannie
DARNEILLE

27th District

2007 Session Report

Dear Neighbors,

Our 2007 legislative session is going very well. There is a spirit of cooperation in our capitol, and leaders are focused on priorities we care deeply about in the 27th district – including education, children's programs, health care, transportation and public safety.

You'd be encouraged by how effectively Pierce County Democrats and Republicans are working together. Our weekly bipartisan meetings keep everyone focused on local priorities, such as reducing the impact in Pierce County of corrections facilities and prisoner releases (*see inside*). Although I'm proud to be Vice Chair of the House Democratic Caucus majority, I feel strongly that bipartisanship is an important part of true leadership.

This report highlights some key legislation I'm supporting to provide property-tax relief, improve education and health care, help foster children and improve public safety. It also explains how I'm trying to help parents learn about a new vaccine that can prevent cervical cancer.



I wish I had space to describe other work I'm doing to serve children, families and businesses in our 27th District—but there's an easy way you can keep up to date. Just send me an e-mail (Darneille.Jeannie@leg.wa.gov) saying you'd like to receive my Legislative E-memo – a periodic update of breaking legislative news with a local flavor. You can unsubscribe at any time, and your e-mail address will *never* be shared with anyone else or used for any political campaign. I respect your privacy!

Please also remember that my legislative assistant, Nancy Ryan, and I take great pride in serving and communicating with constituents. Please don't hesitate to call or write with your thoughts, concerns or questions. You're the reason I'm here, and hearing from you helps me to be an effective voice for our community.

Take care,

Jeannie Darneille
State Representative, 27th District

Priority # 1: Education

If you're like me and believe education is the most important investment we can make in our future, you'll appreciate that Gov. Chris Gregoire and the Legislature are making education the signature issue of 2007.



I'm excited by a new 5-point plan to dramatically improve education in our state from preschool to graduate school.

1. Start early — The earlier children start learning, the greater their chance of success in school and life. Adding 2,000 children to our state's early childhood education program and funding voluntary full-day kindergarten for more schools (including 22 Tacoma schools) will help children get a good start on their education.

2. Fully fund basic education — Boosting state investments in the basics would make a big difference to local schools. This plan will reduce class sizes and greatly increase funding for essentials such as transportation, special education and technology.

3. Put an outstanding teacher in every classroom — Good teachers are the heart of good schools. *Fully* funding the people's initiative to support teachers (I-732) and creating incentives for excellence in teaching will ensure we attract and retain the high quality teachers our children deserve.

4. Help every student succeed and graduate on-time — *Every* child's potential is precious. We can't give up on *any* child. That's why we need new investments in dropout prevention and more personalized help for students who struggle with math and standardized tests. Our plan also improves skill centers and programs for gifted students.

5. Finish strong: college and post-high school — Our 5-point plan creates more opportunities in higher education by expanding enrollments, keeping tuition affordable, and increasing financial aid so more students can attend college or high-quality workforce training programs. We hope to add 8,400 new college enrollments — including additional high demand enrollments at UW-Tacoma.



Healthy kids – the next steps

As a leader in the effort to ensure that every child in Washington has health coverage by 2010, I'm proud we've already covered tens of thousands of Washington children and are on track to achieve our goal. This year, I'm co-sponsoring the next step, which will cover at least 32,000 additional children.

Our children's health care reform will promote immunizations, well-child checkups, mental health treatments and other strategies that reduce health problems and costs.

To me, health coverage for children is a moral issue. It is also smart budgeting. Kids without coverage are more likely to be sick, fall behind in school, and see doctors only in emergency rooms. Covering all kids is the right thing to do from any perspective.

Eliminating cervical cancer

A new vaccine can save the lives of thousands of women by preventing the human papillomavirus (HPV) that causes cervical cancer. It could help *tens* of thousands of women avoid agonizing cervical cancer treatments, which often include radiation, chemotherapy, radical surgeries, and the loss of the ability to have children.

The new vaccine is so effective the American Cancer Society and the Centers for Disease Control recommend it for all 11- and 12-year-old girls. Many states are debating whether to make the vaccine mandatory for all sixth-grade girls, but our state is emphasizing voluntary vaccinations rather than mandates. Gov. Chris Gregoire proposes to invest \$13 million to make the vaccine available for free to all 11 and 12 year old girls, and I'm leading the effort to ensure that schools inform *all* parents of sixth-grade and older girls about the virus and the vaccine.

Mandates should be a last resort. When parents are informed about the facts they will make the right choice for their daughters and talk to their doctors about the vaccine.

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State Representative • 27th District

Building Family Prosperity

My top priority for 2007 is to pass the Family Prosperity Act. I wrote this proposal to help low-income working families move from poverty to self-sufficiency. It is based on lessons we've learned in the Pierce County Asset Building Coalition, where community partners and volunteers have been extremely successful in helping low-income families learn financial skills, get fair tax returns and save for the future.

Did you know that 20% of low-income families don't even have bank accounts? Yet once these families learn about personal finances and the value of even small weekly savings, they're able to steadily build assets for their dreams — including home ownership. Something as simple as volunteer income tax assistance can mean over \$1,000 of additional assets to a family while also bringing money into our local economy.

The Family Prosperity Act builds on the work of the new Washington Asset Building Coalition and local coalitions that help working families build and manage assets. It would also provide financial incentives to encourage Individual Development Accounts that help families build assets for home ownership, business ownership, college, or retirement. Further, it would restrict the unfair use of credit reports for employment purposes.

My bipartisan Family Prosperity Act is supported by a wide spectrum of civic, community, and labor groups. I'm optimistic we can make it law this year.

Demanding fairness for Pierce County

I'm concerned that more than 20% of the state's prison releases are in Pierce County when we only have 12% of the state's population. In fact, 9,000 fewer state prisoners would have been released in Pierce County from 1993 and 2005 if other counties had taken their fair share. The legislature is working on a variety of bills that are crafted to reduce recidivism and improve the reentry into society of ex-offenders. But there is no doubt this disproportionate rate of releases into Pierce County drives up local crime rates.



I've sponsored two bills with other Tacoma area legislators to *require* the Department of Social and Health Services and Department of Corrections to be more equitable when siting juvenile offender or adult work release facilities and ban the Department of Corrections from co-locating *any* program serving violent offenders at Western State Hospital.

As Pierce County Prosecutor Gerry Home testified, our county already has more than its fair share of ex-convicts and sex offenders. It's high time other counties share the burden.

Property-tax relief

People need property-tax relief! Assessed values of Pierce County homes are going through the roof — rising over 40% on average in just two years. This is driving up tax bills and will drive people from their homes unless we pass serious tax relief soon.



Tinkering with tax *rates* won't be enough. We must tackle the root problem: skyrocketing assessed values. One way to do this is to exempt part of the value of each home from property taxes (a Homestead Exemption). Or, we could limit assessed values from rising more than one or two percent a year. Either approach requires a constitutional amendment. I'm leaning toward a constitutional lid on rising assessments. But the important thing is to put real property-tax relief on the ballot and let the public vote. Senior citizens and other homeowners need property-tax relief *now*.



I very much enjoyed a recent visit with 4th Graders from the Annie Wright School. The school has served children in Tacoma since 1884.

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Foster care

The Greater Pierce County Community Network worked 18 months to find better ways to help foster youth make successful transitions to adult life. Sadly, the study found that after foster youth “age out” of the state system at 18, more than half experience long periods of unemployment. 13% become homeless. 22% will be jailed. Remember: the *state* is the parent of foster children. Yet we abandon these children — who have already suffered great hardship and loss — on their 18th birthday, which no decent parent would ever do.

I’m sponsoring several measures to improve mental health services for children in foster care, offer college scholarships to talented foster youth, and allow medical health coverage to continue until age 21. The House has already passed these proposals, and I’m confident we can make them law this year. Foster children deserve our compassion and our help, help that is long overdue.



Ashley, Ariana and Dallas are talented foster youth from Pierce County who testified for the need to improve services and support to help foster youth thrive.

(Photo credit: Sherry Bockwinkel)



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